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DAKAR PLS PASS RAO, ODC, AND DAO

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/13/2016

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [GA](#)

SUBJECT: THE GAMBIA: DISMISSAL OF NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE
AGENCY HEAD

REF: BANJUL 691 ET AL

Classified By: AMBASSADOR JOSEPH STAFFORD, REASON 1.4 (B AND D)

INTELLIGENCE CHIEF SACKED

¶1. (U) On November 10, the GOTG announced the dismissal of the National Intelligence Agency's (NIA) head, Director General Harry Sambou, who had been appointed following the failed coup plot here in March. Sambou's deputy, Momodou Hydara, was named Acting Director General.

¶2. (C) The GOTG gave no reason for Sambou's removal, but the well-informed Chief Editor at the independent daily, "Point," and Embassy contact, Pap Saine (protect), told Ambassador that President Jammeh had ordered Sambou's removal for two reasons. Firstly, according to Saine's sources at the Presidency, Jammeh was upset at the NIA's failure to identify the authors of a tract, "Voice of the Voiceless," circulating clandestinely in the Banjul area. Saine said he himself had not been aware of such a tract and had no further details on its content. (COMMENT: This is also the first we have heard of this tract. END COMMENT) Secondly, Jammeh was reportedly dissatisfied with what he viewed as the NIA's inadequate monitoring of rumored discontent within the Gambian armed forces, fearing that yet another coup plot might be brewing under the NIA's nose.

COMMENT

¶3. (C) Sambou's removal highlights Jammeh's penchant for abrupt high-level personnel changes, as does his October cabinet reshuffle (reftel). We find plausible the reasons advanced by Saine for Sambou's dismissal, which underscores the disarray at the NIA since the coup plot foiled in March. Sambou was widely regarded as a mediocre performer, lacking the influence and leadership skills of his predecessor, Daba Marena, who was detained with various other NIA officials after the foiled overthrow plot, and subsequently escaped, according to the GOTG -- although his whereabouts remain unknown, and many believe that he was secretly executed.

¶4. (C) Despite Sambou's mediocrity, he maintained the counter-terrorism (CT) related cooperation with the U.S. that predecessor Marena had promoted. At this point, we have no reason to believe that Sambou's departure signals an intention by Jammeh to curtail our CT cooperation, but the actions of Sambou's successor in this regard warrant close monitoring. We will seek an early meeting with the new NIA head. END COMMENT
STAFFORD